

Monday, May 31, 2010

LOCATION: Hillcrest Cemetery, Page St., Cary, N.C.

To members of our armed forces, to our veterans, to honored guests, Congressman Price, and families of the fallen -- I am deeply honored to be with you on Memorial Day.

Thank you to Commander William Cozzolino, Bob Filguski and all the members of Cary Post 67 for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to recognize Hal Shook, one of our Greatest Generation World War II veterans, whose mission on D-Day was to defend Omaha Beach. During battle from the skies above, he watched thousands of his fellow troops storm the beach from their battleships, cruisers and destroyers. We lost so many of those fresh-faced GIs who answered the call to duty with a fury unlike we had ever seen – a determination that saved the world.

We gather in this sacred place during wartime - once more bringing fresh grief for families of the loved ones who were called upon to battle in the mountains of Afghanistan in search of a hidden enemy and to prevail in the deserts of Iraq. All across our country, people are pausing to remember, to mourn, and to pray.

I can't answer what brings young soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of this generation to say "I'll go" when duty calls. In a self-absorbed society that too often rewards the "me only" philosophy, I really can't say. But, we are grateful that so many have you have heard the call and risen to the task.

Two of my uncles served in World War II, both of them are buried at Arlington. But, I cannot know what it is like to walk into battle.

However, I do know I am humbled to be a public servant in Washington and I will do everything I can to keep our country safe. When our troops are sent into harm's way, I want to provide you

with the equipment and support you need to get the job done. I pledge every effort to take care of you when you come home from missions and to take care of your families while you are away.

Military families who feel the absence and are forced to sacrifice more than we can understand should know that a grateful nation owes everything to those who serve under The Stars and Stripes. We will never forget the burdens they carried for all of us.

Hal Shook said in an interview once – "recognize the veterans, whether they were in combat or not; because every one of them stood tall, and by golly they feel deeply about their country and they're going to do whatever they have to, to ensure we have a free way of life. Now, that's the basic mission."

I leave you with the words of another great American who spoke at a monument to the deeds of our fighting men at Bunker Hill. Daniel Webster said:

"Our poor work may perish, but thine shall endure: this monument may moulder away, the solid ground it rests upon may sink down to the level of the sea; but thy memory shall not fail. Wherever among men a heart shall be found that beats to the transports of patriotism and liberty, its aspirations shall claim kindred with thy spirit!"

Somewhere in the desert sands of Afghanistan or Iraq, a young soldier is praying for the day he will return to his family to glimpse the face of his newborn child.

We pray for the safe return of our troops as we honor those who did not come home.

God bless you, God bless the fallen.